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ABSTRACT

How officials and community leaders in Cattaraugus County see and understand the county government and its functions is discussed in this paper. The purpose of the study is to determine the opinions of officials and leaders on the need for more information on county government and major issues, on Cooperative Extension being involved in public affairs educational program efforts, and for Cooperative Extension to develop a comprehensive continuing education program in public affairs. A model of the public problem solving process is presented, with emphasis on the lack of knowledge of the processes of local government by the citizenry. Results of a questionnaire and survey are presented; charts are used to illustrate responses. Using conclusions based on the results of the study, a public affairs program on county government is proposed. A selected bibliography and sample questionnaire are included. (RS)

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A STUDY OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
OPINIONS ON PUBLIC INFORMATION ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
IN CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, NEW YORK

A Research Report

Presented To

The Department of Extension Education  
University of Missouri, Columbia

In Fulfillment of Requirements

For A Research Project, Extension Education 450

by

Roger W. Lord

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The increasing speed with which technological, economic, social, and political developments are occurring create pressures on the citizens in our country.

This modernization process is occurring in a political democracy where citizens, with the help of their leaders, are expected to decide their individual and collective destinies and how to create social progress. (10)

Of the existing governmental bodies, perhaps the one closest to the citizens which has the most effect on their lives is the county government. With this statement in mind, consider the possibility that the county government is the least understood and has the most diversified structures among counties and states of any government body.

As Gilbertson (12) put it, the county government is the "Dark Continent" of American politics. He feels that the American people, although trying to understand political democracy, have neglected to study the county government.

Could it be then, that lack of public participation in community affairs and on issues which involve them is in part related to lack of understanding of county government responsibilities and methods of operation?

County officials, elected or appointed, are under different pressures from many sources in their positions as public servants.

Pressed for time to carry out their duties, they may overlook the possibility that the public they serve does not know exactly how they go about carrying out this service. This could be as true in Cattaraugus County as any other.

The citizens are busy going about the business of living, and also under many pressures, of other kinds perhaps, but still having a profound influence on their lives. Governmental activities are thought of at election time, when taxes are due, or when some problem has arisen in a community. Many citizens are too preoccupied to take time to learn about the vital functions of democracy or the opportunity is not made available for them to learn about their local government.

Education can help improve understanding. This has to be done in such a way as to be effective but not burdensome to either the public (citizen) or the county official. An organization which could carry on this educational program is Cooperative Extension and in this study, more specifically, the Cattaraugus County Cooperative Extension Association. Cooperative Extension, throughout its half century of existence, has proven it can carry on effective educational programs.

There is a need for more county residents, in particular those in Cattaraugus County, to be informed, to understand and participate in county government and its many processes. However, the problem appears to be that there is a lack of knowledge of Cattaraugus County citizens of the purposes and functions of county government. To this county and others we can apply a statement by Rowat (23) who makes this clear:

Today it is essential that citizens and local officials take an intelligent interest in all aspects of local government. They must know not only what it is, but also why it is here. If they understand this, they are in a position to know its value to them as citizens or as citizen's representatives.

It is the purpose of this paper to work toward fulfilling that goal.

#### Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

One of the principles of Community Development is that people should have the opportunity to increase their knowledge and capabilities to bring about desired changes. (11) Applying this to the problem at hand then, the people in a county should have the opportunity to learn more about public decision making through public affairs education, to increase their participation.

The concepts of community resource development and public affairs education should be explained for clarity. Public affairs education is viewed in this paper as being a part of community resource development, thus, no attempt will be made to explain the latter in depth.

Community resource development has no one definition which meets with general acceptance. One that applies to the study being made is: a process of education to change people through their participation in both public and private affairs.

Public affairs education can best be defined by examining in more detail the first two words. Public affairs may be contrasted with private affairs to see the difference. A private affair is when the consequences of an act are confined to the group of individuals who are involved in it. Public affairs occur when the consequences of an act by a person or group of people are extended beyond those directly involved in it, and when there is an effort by others to influence these consequences. (5) To put it in another way, when the consequences of an act are received by others

beyond those immediately concerned it becomes public. (9) If private acts are of such importance they need public control then this becomes public affairs. Economic problems, social problems and political problems may be public affairs problems. The ability to act upon them varies depending on how crucial the issue is, agreement on a course of action and capacity to do something about it. Knowledge of political processes is very important at this stage whether at federal, state or county levels. (5)

Recent changes in governmental structure have occurred in Cattaraugus County which may have reduced the knowledge of county government functions and processes. The existing form of government was initiated January 1, 1970. It is a governing body called a legislature, made up of 25 legislators. Previous to this time, the governing body was a Board of Supervisors made up of 49 members. One man represents more people than previously and results in less contact with constituents. More details on the existing county government will be presented later in another section.

There is a need to know more clearly the existing opinions of county leaders and government officials on the current issues. Is there a need for more comprehensive educational opportunities?

Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs education has been clearly spelled out in the Smith-Lever Act. The specific posture is education, however, not policy determination. It is the responsibility of the people themselves to make their own decisions in the public decision-making process. (5)

Importance of people. When one discusses public affairs education

or community development, he is in the final analysis talking about people. It does no good to plan development or education without considering the people who are to be involved.

Social learning approach theory. In this study we are concerned about people in the county becoming more knowledgeable about county government processes and functions. This can be viewed as relating very closely to the social learning approach theory discussed by Zimbardo and Ebbesen. (26) This theory includes three phases of learning, which in this paper, are not used in the strictly social-psychological approach as used by the authors. The three phases include as a first step, determination of the behavioral change that is to occur; then specify what, or the "stuff" people involved have learned previously, and is presently controlling their behavior. Finally, after this information is found, the technique which is most likely to produce a change in the information is applied.

Applying the theory to this research study involves some modification, but appears to provide a logical framework for investigation. The changes in behavior desired include increased participation of citizens in the decision making process through increased knowledge of county government processes, and also, more concern by county officials for public education on these processes. An assessment, therefore, is needed of existing feelings of understanding of county government by county officials and community leaders to determine the extent of the change needed.

The second phase involves an attempt to specify the "stuff" or what people have learned and are presently thinking that is affecting their behavior.

The behavior of a person involved in making public affairs decisions is determined by a large extent by his beliefs and values. Beliefs are a

person's perception of what is, or the facts, and are only changed when he explores new information. The concept of values can be defined as the normative standards by which humans are influenced in making choices of alternatives. (17) Perhaps they could be viewed as what "ought to be" or the goals strived for. Values are very similar in public affairs to interests so that they are the normative standard of what is desirable. The same is true of public interests; that is, they become the normative standard for the public. (5)

The objective then, in this modified social learning approach,  
is to find the current interests, beliefs of the people involved; in  
this case, the county officials and community leaders. How do they view the importance and complexity of county government: Do they feel citizen knowledge and participation is adequate or there is a need for clarification of ideas, issues and organization? Is public affairs education an acceptable role for Cooperative Extension in their view?

Perhaps more important, what are the characteristics of the individuals which affect their actions as community leaders and county officials? The location in the county, especially rural or urban will be examined, and educational attainment level of each individual will be determined.

Effects of residence in participation in public affairs programs was examined by Harp and Cummings in New York in a 1968 study. (15) Results showed that highest percentage of participants in a public affairs program were from farm or open country. The same study also showed little difference of educational attainment level between rural or urban, but that those with a higher level will express stronger interests. The positive effects of educational attainment level were further supported

by Clark and Timothy (4) in a study of rural community residents' attitudes, concluding that the higher the educational level of the respondent, the more favorable his feeling toward the issue that was studied.

Other aspects, such as whether an individual is a community leader or county official and elected or appointed may have an effect on the interests and beliefs of the individuals.

The study by Clark and Timothy already mentioned showed the effect of perception of government's role in a public issue. One of the findings was that the more the individual perceived government's role as legitimate, the more favorable his attitude. The view of government as seen by county officials, whether elected or appointed, and community leaders, may have an effect on their beliefs and interests of public knowledge of county government and Cooperative Extension's role in the author's study.

The final step in the social learning approach is that of finding the technique which is most likely to produce a change in the information and is then applied. This becomes the important part of this study, which will deal with analyzing the data collected from the county officials and community leaders for pertinent characteristics or behavior. The conclusion and implications may give clues for techniques in public affairs programming which will increase effectiveness in influencing interests in participation in county government educational programs for Cattaraugus County.

The previous discussion leads us to forming some questions and hypothesis.

General researchable question. What are the opinions of county

officials and community leaders on public information of county government and Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs in Cattaraugus County?

Specific research questions.

1. Are the opinions of county officials and community leaders on public information on county government influenced by their residence in the county, educational attainment level, whether community leader or county official, and whether elected or appointed?
2. Are the opinions of county officials and community leaders on Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs influenced by the residence in the county, educational attainment level, whether community leader or county official, and whether elected or appointed?

General hypothesis. The degree of interest in educational information on county government and Cooperative Extension involvement expressed by county officials and community leaders will be influenced by their residence, educational level, whether county officials or community leaders, and whether elected or appointed.

Specific hypothesis.

1. A higher degree of interest in public knowledge of county government will be expressed by respondents from urban areas, community leaders, appointed officials and respondents with a higher educational attainment level.
2. A higher degree of support for Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs will be expressed by respondents from rural areas, community leaders, appointed officials and respondents with a higher educational level.

Definitions. To be sure terminology being used in this study is clear, the concepts and definitions of terms used will be explained.

County Officials - This term is used to include both elected officials (legislators) and appointed officials (department heads).

Legislators - Twenty five officials elected for a two year term from the election districts in the county.

Department Head - An appointed official who has responsibility for carrying out one of the functions of county government.

Election District - Ten election districts exist in Cattaraugus County based on one legislator representing 1/25 of the county population.

County Government - A term used to include the legislators, department heads, other personnel and all the agencies and offices that are involved in carrying on county operations and services.

Community Leaders - Individuals representing the major segments in the county (other than county government): education, agriculture, industry, credit, religion, retailing, private business, professionals, local government (town or municipal).

Extension Involvement - The assistance in organizing, planning and carrying out a public affairs program by Cooperative Extension staff and leadership.

Residence - Location of individual's home, whether rural or urban. Rural residence is defined as that other than the Olean and Salamanca urban areas.

Educational Level - The formal academic training of the individual. This was measured in terms of elementary, high school, college and post-college.

Limitations

This study, conducted during December 1971 represents responses from the community leaders and county officials of Cattaraugus County at one point in time.

It is an attempt to measure opinions and attitudes which are difficult to measure. Large differences were not evident between the groups compared.

Personal biases could be injected into results, especially in open ended questions without safeguards. Other graduate students and university professors served as judges to minimize the effect of this danger.

The study is focused in one county with its own peculiar problems, form of government and public issues. The results are therefore appropriate only to Cattaraugus County and during the time it was conducted.

Justification

1. Research is needed to determine if county officials and community leaders throughout the county feel there is a lack of knowledge of government processes in Cattaraugus County.

2. This research should help identify specific approaches to developing a comprehensive continuing educational program for the public on county government.

3. Very little research has been done to determine if lack of knowledge of county government processes leads to lack of citizen participation.

4. It is logical for an educational program to be done at the county level of government by a county organization since it is closer

to the situation and more rapid adjustments can be made in program.

5. The research may have implications for other counties in New York State which suffer from a lack of citizen participation in the political decision making process.

Purpose of Study

1. To determine the opinions of community leaders and county officials on the need for more information on county government for the county citizens and major issues of public concern.

2. To determine the opinions of county officials and community leaders on Cooperative Extension being involved in public affairs educational program efforts.

3. To use the findings for Cooperative Extension to develop a comprehensive continuing educational program jointly with the county officials and community leaders.

## CHAPTER II

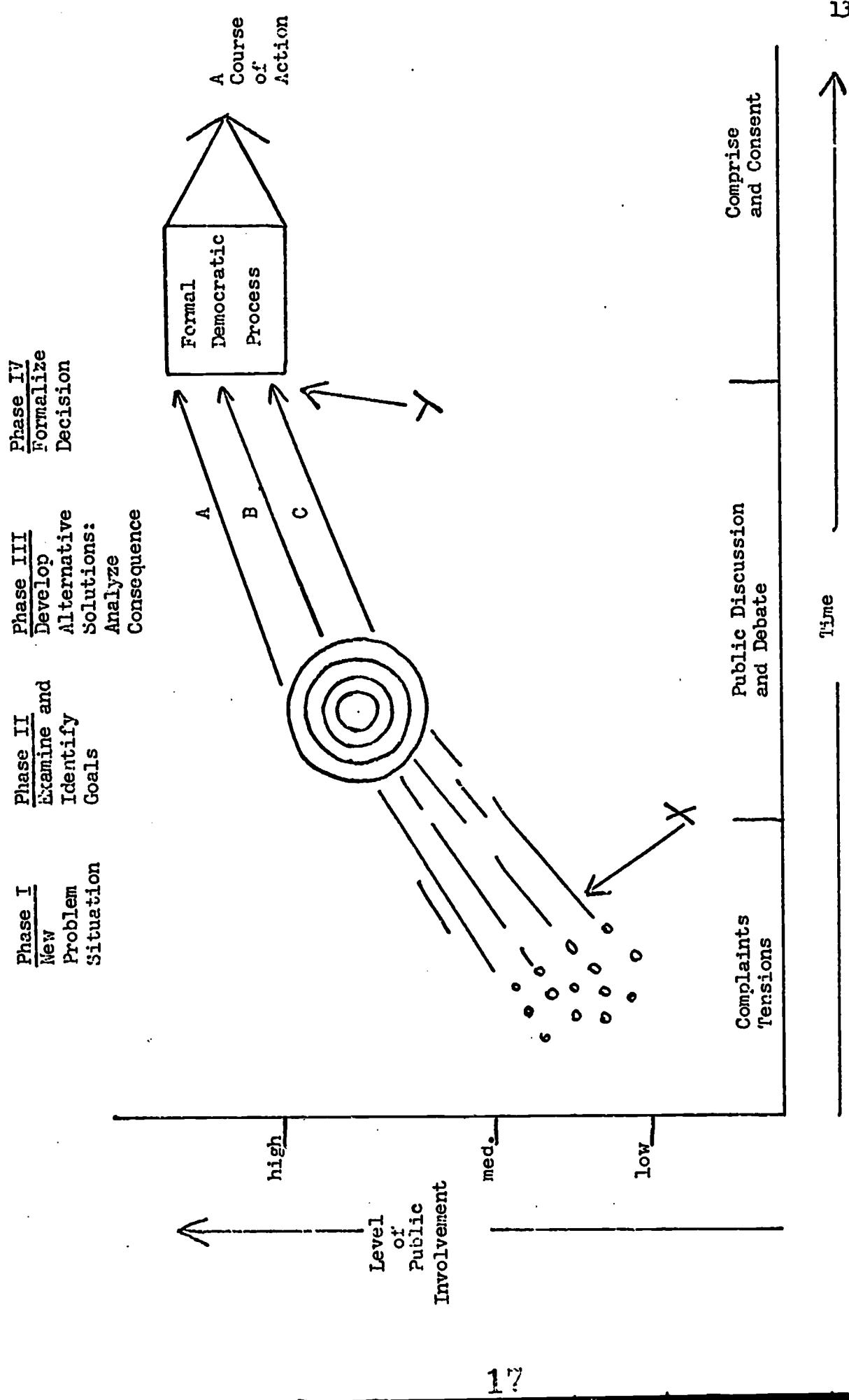
## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many apparent causes of citizens not participating in the political process. There also are many reasons why local government officials may possibly contribute to this problem. We will examine these, select what appears to be a major contributing factor for further study, and then explain why Cooperative Extension should be involved in this important problem.

The problem location can be viewed in a model of the public problem solving process, Figure 1, found in a report on Cooperative Extension policy. (5)

The model shows public involvement increasing with time through the democratic process. This requires the knowledge of when to be involved and how the political process works. The author believes that if the proper knowledge is lacking either at points X or Y, there is no access to the process and the result is more tension, complaints, or apathy. Point X is the time where people might consider forming committees, or seeking out the proper office for answers to a particular issue. Assuming this phase is completed, they may form committees or obtain information. Then the committees or individuals will make their feelings known in a more formal way, at point Y, for decision making. But, if the proper political process is not known at either points X or Y, or if timing has been wrong; frustration results. To better understand what factors affect the knowledge available at points X and Y an examination of the pressures affecting citizens and

**Figure 1. PUBLIC PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS**



government is needed.

#### Apparent Causes of Lack of Citizen Participation

Studies of political participation have indicated that, in general, about one quarter of the eligible adults do not even vote, another fifty percent only vote, and very few actually become actively involved in campaigns, debates, letters, etc. Some of the reasons behind these depressing facts are that the average citizens are more involved with their families and friends than with the entire community, more concerned with immediate short run personal problems than with long range community problems, and think in terms of concrete specific details instead of abstract concerns of political and community affairs. (14)

Another consideration is the population of the area, their beliefs about the political system, and how highly they value their responsibilities as citizens. Mobile populations may be less participative since they may not be located in a given area long enough to learn the system. Other considerations are the political structure or lack of leadership which could contribute to lack of participation.

The area the author would like to explore is the possibility of the lack of knowledge on the part of the citizen of the actual processes of local government, and in this study, the county government of Cattaraugus County. The actual workings of county government, as stated previously, are complex and vague. The departments within each county government can number quite high, Cattaraugus County having thirty-one. The functions of each department vary and a person may not need to know everything about all of them, but should know enough to be able to be involved in the decision making process. This is one of the most important aspects of community development; that those affected by a decision have

a voice in it. (22)

The elected representatives (from districts in Cattaraugus County are called legislators) need to assure good understanding on the part of the public of how they function, how public issues are dealt with and when the public can participate.

Part of the problem is also the apparent lack of educating youth on their own county government. They are demanding a greater voice in determining the conditions that influence them. We should provide opportunities for students to secure insight into the operations and structure of their county government.

The citizens may not be aware of what government has done simply because it has not been reported to them. This, and the other considerations mentioned, all contribute to the lack of knowledge of the process which influences points X and Y in the model.

Pressure on county government. The people that occupy positions in county government are under stress from many directions and of different intensities.

1. Pressures from outside. The federal government and its agencies are involved in pressure on county government, but not to the extent of the state level. The pressures are felt locally in three areas; federal aid programs, joint federal-local programs and special federal interests. These usually mean local matching funds and considerable reporting.

State government and its agencies exert pressure in the form of carrying out many state functions, adequate records, adequate funding of joint programs, and maintaining local services. The effect of state legislation has been to reduce the portion of local expenditures over which the county officials have effective control. (8)

This creates additional pressure from local sources such as special districts (fire or water), taxpayers, or special interest groups. An example of a special interest group in Cattaraugus County is one that was formed to ask the legislature to oppose the installation of a dam in the county. If this type of group is not allowed access at the county level to decision making, it is almost impossible for it to gain access at the state or national level.

The voter or constituent concerns can be viewed as pressure since they have certain expectations of their representative. The pressures are exerted in the form of demands for economy, good services, efficiency, and impartiality.

2. Pressure from inside. Most of the essential record keeping of this society is done at the local level; a tremendous responsibility. Political parties and their pressure tactics create difficulties. To the legislator this is only part-time work, since they have regular full time jobs elsewhere.

The employees who are employed by county government are becoming more vocal and causing more time to be spent in dealing with personnel relations. (8)

Within departments there is pressure for funds, reports and possibly even some confusion which add to the problem. There is also in some areas, the trend for reorganizing the structure of county government (13) which creates extra work for studies, and apprehension. Eventually, this may be a partial answer to the problem, but will take time. One study (25) showed that the majority of county board members in a rural area are opposed to reform, but their attitudes were such that they could be changed.

3. Recognition of the need. These pressures from within and without effect the activities of the county government officials. Some are concerned, however, about the lack of participation of citizens. In a case study by Kyd (18) of Missouri State Legislators, he found that only about twelve percent of the respondents believed their constituents had a good understanding of government. All the legislators were concerned about this and felt there was a lack of means to keep the public thoroughly informed, although better use of mass media might improve the situation.

A concern which becomes obvious when one reviews discussion of the "New County" (21) or newer forms of county government (?) is the lack of consideration for a public information or educational phase of the governmental structure. Bromage (3) in 1933 believed that reform was narrowing the gap between county government and the general public, however, it still exists today. Undoubtedly, some changes in government structure will help to narrow this gap, but the fact is, people need to be involved in the process now.

Evidence of county official concern for the problem shows up in county annual reports, where the officials feel they need to report to taxpayers for complete understanding of legislative problems (20), and held conferences on ways of improving communications between government and citizens. (19) One county in New York has held a County Government Week for about eight years in an effort to combat the lack of public understanding. (16) It appears that this interest has grown since 1923 when a study of local governments near Chicago showed 53 percent of them did no reporting of activities at all to the public or anyone else. (2)

Good communication of citizen goals to government and government's

goals to citizens is stressed in a new program on local government in Missouri. (1)

Points X and Y can be most directly affected by county government concern for education at those points.

The Role of Land Grant Universities and Cooperative Extension in Public Affairs

The land grant university. The land grant university has a responsibility to help all people, rural and urban alike, to provide scientific facts and principles for solution of their social and economic problems. To fulfill its responsibilities it will be necessary to expand its efforts in research and Extension. (5)

Cooperative Extension. There is no question of Cooperative Extension's responsibility for public affairs educational programs. It is stated in the Smith-Lever Act and reinforced by the insistant demands of people for help in solving public problems. (5) It is what Extension should be doing, as implied by Kerker. (16) A report on the scope of Extension work clarifies the role as that of better equipping the people it serves through education to analyze public issues on the basis of scientific facts and principles and enable them to make their own decisions on these issues. (5) In 1968, another study report recommended that Cooperative Extension should double its programs in public affairs education. (6)

County Cooperative Extension. The lowest level of Cooperative Extension is at the county level. It is closest to the county problems, can make changes more quickly, and, as pointed out in a recent study, the local office should be a place where the individual citizen can obtain information about programs and services of government at all levels. (6)

Summary

1. Lack of participation of citizens in the county political process is at least partially due to lack of knowledge concerning the the process and functions of county government.
2. County government officials, elected and appointed, are under pressure from many directions so public information programs may not be carried on at a high level.
3. Land grant universities and Cooperative Extension have responsibility for providing assistance at the local level with public programs through public affairs education.

## CHAPTER III

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Background for Design - Cattaraugus County Situation

1. Government changes. Since county government became an entity in 1817 until recently it has been structured on a township basis. The governing body of the county was called the Board of Supervisors, made up of one representative from each township and from each ward in the two cities, Salamanca and Olean, forty-nine total.

On January 1, 1970 a change was made to a legislature form of government based on the one man, one vote requirement. The government then became known as the Cattaraugus County Legislature. The county was divided into districts, with each district representing one-twenty-fifth of the total population and legislators elected from each of the districts to serve on the legislature. The number of legislators is twenty-five. They are paid only a small amount of money and therefore have other employment. School teachers, real estate salesmen, businessmen are examples of some of the legislators other job responsibilities.

Currently the legislature is studying the possibility of another government change - to a county charter possibly.

2. Economic interests. Since Cattaraugus County is the fourth largest in New York State, it is natural for some differences in economic interests, particularly rural and urban, to develop. It is primarily a rural county but about one-half the population lives in the two urban areas, Salamanca and Olean. Agricultural industry is large, about \$24,000,000,

and the recreation business opportunities are growing. This is because of the closeness to Buffalo, with large numbers of people wanting "fresh air," and the availability of open land for development.

3. Basis of study. Because of the recent changes in government and increased importance of knowing government processes and the existing rural-urban differences it is important to know the current thinking of decision-making people. The community leaders and county officials form the basis for the population to be studied.

#### Details of Design

This type of study has now been done before in Cattaraugus County to the author's knowledge. It could be useful in developing a nucleus of people for public affairs education planning.

#### General procedures

1. Literature was reviewed relating to county government, public affairs education and citizen participation. This included past studies (ERIC) and dissertations, Adult Leadership Journals, Adult Education Journals, Cooperative Extension Journals, and other pertinent readings.

2. Interviews with professors in Community Development, Extension Education, and Sociology at the University of Missouri. In addition, consultations were held with field staff in the new local government positions in Missouri.

3. Approval was obtained from department advisor before conducting study.

4. Proposal was legitimized with the Cattaraugus County Legislature Chairman, County Auditor and President of the New York State County Officer's Association.

The sample. For the purposes of this study a purposive sample was used. There are pitfalls when using a sampling procedure such as this. The most obvious one is that it could be biased. There is also the possibility that the sample picked may not be typical of the population.

However, with good judgement and appropriate strategy, one can choose those to be included in the sample and thus develop samples that are satisfactory to the needs in the study. Typical representatives of the categories should be picked. (24)

The author's reasons for using this sampling procedure were economy, convenience, and practicability. It would be beyond available resources to include the entire county or state population. The important decisions made will be influenced strongly by the county officials and community leaders. It is with these groups of people that the author is concerned in this study and in studying the relationship among the variables of these people.

The primary sample included the entire population of twenty-five county legislators; seventeen of whom responded, and twenty-seven county department personnel; with nineteen responding. The seventy-three community leaders were representatives of various county-wide organizations such as Cancer Society and Dairyman's League; volunteer groups such as League of Women Voters and service clubs; local governments; mass media; businessmen; professionals and influentials. The addition of these made the total sample one hundred twenty-five. Fifty-six community leaders returned questionnaires. Ninety-two usable questionnaires were received, one not usable, one too late for the tabulation, for a total of ninety-four - a seventy-four percent return.

An attempt was made to obtain nearly equal representation of

rural and urban interests for comparison purposes, with sixty-two rural and sixty-three urban potential respondents. Fifty-five rural and thirty-seven urban returned questionnaires.

The questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study contains these main areas for study:

1. County government and public understanding.
  - a. Importance of county government.
  - b. Degree of complexity.
  - c. Public participation in, and knowledge of, county government.
2. Attitudes toward public knowledge of county government.
3. Feelings toward Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs.
4. Characteristics of the respondent.

Pretesting was done to help assure validity and minimize possibilities of misinterpretation of questions and directions in the questionnaire.

The pretests were done in Niagara County, New York, and in Boone County, Missouri, with respondents who were representative of the study population; that is, county officials and community leaders. Other graduate students and college professors at the University of Missouri also participated in the questionnaire development.

The mail survey. The questionnaire was mailed to the respondents due to limited time and finances available. It is recognized that there are some reservations to using a mail questionnaire. The people who respond may not be representative of the groups that the questionnaire was sent to, response level is usually low, there is the chance of misrepresentation or omission of items, and it is impersonal. (24)

In spite of these disadvantages and more, the author used this method since more people could be surveyed in a shorter period of time with little extra help.

The procedure for mailing included mental-set letter, letter of transmittal, the questionnaire, a return envelope (self-addressed and stamped), a post card to indicate interest in receiving a copy of the report of the study, and a follow-up letter mailed shortly after the deadline. (See Appendixes A,B,C, and D.)

some uncertainty by elected officials as to the value of such training.

Table 2  
Training as Being Helpful for New Officials

Response	Community Leaders		County Officials		Elected		Appointed		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	47	84	27	75	27	73	13	86	74	80
No	2	4	2	6	1	3	1	7	3	4
Undecided	7	13	7	19	9	24	1	7	15	15
Total	56	100	36	100	37	100	15	100	92	100

Restriction of tax base. This question is concerned with whether federal and state governments have unduly restricted the tax base in the county. The results show the largest percentage of community leaders (forty-three) were undecided, while forty-two percent of the county officials feel that the tax base was restricted. The totals indicate nearly as many undecided as in the affirmative, inferring no definite conclusion can be drawn on this point.

Only one-third of the respondents made comments concerning the tax base restriction with most indicating that the federal and state governments "used up" the tax base and had too much "tax exempt property".

Home rule. Table 3 shows that eighty percent of the respondents indicated that county government should have greater home rule powers. Comparing community leaders with county officials showed seventy-seven percent for the leaders and eighty-six percent for the officials, indicating a trend that those in government may feel more strongly that they should have more home rule power.

Table 3  
Should County Have Greater Home Rule Powers

Response	Community Leaders		County Officials		Elected		Appointed		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	45	78	31	86	29	78	13	87	74	81
No	5	11	3	8	6	16	1	7	9	10
Undecided	5	11	2	6	2	5	1	7	8	9
Total	55	100	36	100	37	100	15	100	91	100

Chi-Square test showed no significant differences.

Personnel knowledge of county departments. The first question of two in this section, Table 4, deals with the knowledge of purposes and functions of various county departments by the personnel who work in these departments. Three-fourths of the respondents felt the county personnel were "moderately" or "ill-informed". A highly significant difference was found between community leaders and officials with a higher proportion of the community leaders indicating the department personnel were "moderately" to "ill-informed". Appointed officials tended to feel department personnel were more uninformed than did the elected officials.

The second question displayed in Table 5 concerned feelings of how well informed county legislators are of county departments functions. Eighty-three percent of all respondents felt legislators were "moderately" to "uninformed" on county departments. A significant difference was found again between community leaders and county officials. A higher proportion of the county officials (including the legislators themselves) indicated "moderately" to "uninformed" than did the community leaders. The appointed officials tended to feel that legislators were more uninformed than did the elected officials.

Table 4

County Government Personnel Knowledge  
of County Departments

Response	Community Leaders		County Officials		Elected	Appointed	Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very Well Informed	1	3	3	9	2	6	1	8
Well Informed	8	15	8	22	9	25	2	14
Mod. Informed	38	68	19	54	22	63	8	57
Ill Informed	7	14	5	5	2	6	3	21
<u>Total</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>100</u>

Chi-square highly significant at .01 probability level between community leaders and county officials.

Table 5

County Legislators Knowledge  
of County Departments

Response	Community Leaders		County Officials		Elected	Appointed	Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very Well Informed	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
Well Informed	10	18	4	11	9	24	1	7
Mod. Informed	36	64	19	53	17	46	9	60
Ill Informed	7	13	11	31	8	22	5	33
<u>Uninformed</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>100</u>

Chi-square significant at the .05 probability level between community leaders and county officials.

When comparing the two questions together the community leaders felt that both county personnel and legislators tend to be uninformed on department functions while the county officials indicated that legislators tend to lack this knowledge more than the county personnel.

To determine differences in degree of attitudes and interests on the importance of county government as expressed by the respondents, weights were assigned to questions one to seven. Answers indicating a positive feeling received the most weight.

Table 6 shows that a high proportion of respondents perceive county government as important and complex. A slightly stronger feeling of this importance was reflected by the respondents who were urban, county officials and appointed officials, although no significant differences occurred between these groups.

Table 6

**How Respondents View the Importance  
of County Government**

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Scores of Questions 1 through 7  
Range: Total Score=3 to 23. Mean=.43 to 3.29.

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<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
Rural N=54	2.14
Urban N=37	2.50
Community Leader N=55	2.44
County Official N=36	2.49
Elected N=37	2.43
Appointed N=15	2.53
High School N=28	2.43
Some College N=20	2.48
College Graduate N=40	2.16
<u>All Respondents N=91</u>	<u>2.16</u>
T-test showed no significant differences.	

Table 9

**Respondents Views of Major Issues  
Facing County Government**

Ranking By Groups (obtained from percent responses)

Issue	Total	P rural	U rban	C ommunity L eaders	C ounty O fficials	E lected	A ppointed	H igh S chool	C ollege	C ollege G raduate
Expanding Costs	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	2
Welfare	2	3	1	1	3	3	3	2	3	1
Taxes	3	2	3	2	4	2	4	1	2	5
Administration	4	4	4	4	2	4	2	5	4	3
Home Rule	5	5	6	5	5	5	-	7	5	4
Ecology	6	6	7	6	7	6	5	3	-	-
Waste Disposal	7	7	5	7	6	7	-	6	-	6

Others named include: "urbanization," "employment" and "duplication" accounted for only four percent of the responses. Five respondents did not answer. The dash (-) indicates that item was not named by that group.

Table 11

Priorities of Issues on Which Cooperative Extension  
Should Provide Education as Seen by Respondents

Issues by number of times ranked (1) high, (2) med. (3) low.					
<u>Community Leaders (N=50)</u>		<u>County Officials (N=22)</u>		<u>Total (N=72)*</u>	
<u>High Priority</u>					
Issue	No.	Issue	No.	Issue	No.
Welfare	29	Welfare	14	Welfare	85
Environmental Quality	26	Sanitary Land Fill	14	Environmental Quality	63
Industrial Development	20	Industrial Development	11	Industrial Development	52
New Government Services	19	Assessment	11	Sanitary Land Fill	46
<u>Medium Priority</u>					
Elderly	21	Environmental Quality	9	Elderly	64
Recreation	19	Family & Child	9	Recreation	46
Assessment	18	Elderly	8	Assessment	31
Industrial Development	17	Doctor Shortage	7	Industrial Development	30
<u>Low Priority</u>					
Family & Child	21	New Government Services	13	Family & Child	67
Tax Mapping	18	Recreation	12	Recreation	65
Doctor Shortage	17	Family & Child	10	Reorganization of Government	43
Recreation	16	Doctor Shortage	10	Doctor Shortage	31

\*15 returns not usable, 5 omits. (Totals may be more than 72 since one respondent is in more than one group.)

representation of the various categories with professional and business being slightly larger.

Table 15

Length of Time Respondents Have Lived  
in Cattaraugus County

<u>Years</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
1 - 10	14	15
11 - 30	14	15
31 - 45	28	31
<u>Over 45</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>99*</u>

\*One omit

Table 16

Occupations of Respondents

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Professional	17	17
Business	17	17
County Government	16	16
Farmer	10	11
Worker or Laborer in Business	8	10
Education	8	10
Media (Radio, Newspaper)	6	8
Other (Housewife, City)	10	11
<u>Total</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>100</u>

was designed to collect opinions or attitudes concerning the following main points of how community leaders and county officials viewed:

1. the importance and complexity of county government.
2. the public knowledge of county government.
3. the involvement of Cooperative Extension in public affairs education program efforts.
4. the major problems and issues facing county government.

Types of questions used were closed and open ended. The closed questions were designed to give the respondents an opportunity to express their feelings on a scale which could then later be weighted to allow measurement of degree of respondents' attitude toward the subject. The open-ended questions were designed to collect in the respondent's own words his perception of various problems, issues and opportunities.

The instrument was pre-tested with representative groups in Niagara County, New York, and Boone County, Missouri. Also, other graduate students and University of Missouri, Columbia professors provided valuable assistance in its development.

Questionnaires were mailed in Cattaraugus County to fifty-two county officials and seventy-three community leaders, for a total of one hundred twenty-five potential respondents. Thirty-six county officials and fifty-six community leaders returned questionnaires. In addition, one was returned too late and one was not usable, for a total of ninety-four or a seventy-four percent return.

The respondents were classified and grouped to determine if differences existed which might be useful knowledge in program development. The groups were: community leader - county official; rural - urban; elected - appointed; education levels of high school - some college -

of citizens are as follows:

- a majority of community leaders, county officials and elected officials feel that appointed officials do not want more citizen participation.

- a majority of appointed officials feel they do want more citizen participation.

11. Major issues facing county government as perceived by the respondents include expending costs to meet demands, welfare, taxes and the operation and administration of county government as the top four. These may become important considerations for any educational efforts attempted.

12. The concern and interest of the leaders and officials responding was shown by their expression of willingness to participate in public information programs on county government.

13. Strong support was indicated for Cooperative Extension to provide educational programs on programs proposed by county government and for help in organizing efforts on a continuing educational program on county government.

14. The leaders and officials views of the top priority issues for any educational program were welfare, environmental quality, industrial development and sanitary land fill.

15. Lack of citizen participation may be due to lack of knowledge about county government and problems since both officials and leaders inferred this by indicating an informed citizen would support government's efforts in solving problems.

16. The role of Cornell University in public affairs education as viewed by the respondents was varied, but seemed to indicate that it is important for Cornell to have a role and to serve as a back-up

resource institution with research, information and guidelines for the local people.

### Implications

This type of study could be viewed as exploratory in nature resulting in information that has varied implications for Cooperative Extension programming. It has provided a "starting point" or "benchmark" for any public affairs educational programs initiated by Cooperative Extension.

1. Perhaps the most encouraging finding with wide-sweeping implications is that a very high percentage of the community leaders and county officials feel strongly that there is a need for a public information program on county government. This feeling persists regardless of the residence, educational level, whether elected or appointed, and whether community leader or county official. With ninety-four leaders and officials taking time to fill out the questionnaire, and making additional comments, this indicates strong interest and concern. This, coupled with the fact that with little difference between groups on the need for more education, a program of this nature should result in strong support throughout the county and in the county government's offices.

2. Before Cooperative Extension embarks on a public affairs education program of this nature, it is important that the feelings and concerns of the leaders and decision-makers be known.

3. The study may have been educational in nature by stimulating thinking evidenced by the several side comments. This effect may persist for a time, implying a need to continually "sound out" leaders and officials.

4. This study may be of high interest to county government

officials themselves to reveal what leaders in the county feel about government and its problems. The results may be useful in guiding future approaches to problems.

5. The complexity of the issues raised seem to imply a continuing educational program with a gradual development of different phases to be effective in helping the public understand better county government and the problems it faces.

6. The leaders and officials who responded to this study should be deeply involved in the development, planning and implementation of a program for the public.

7. An educational program relating to county government could have a two-pronged approach as implied by the findings. One - a public information program dealing with problems facing county government (actually facing all county residents) and two - a public educational program on county government to better inform county citizens on the purposes, functions and operations of all phases of county government.

Another phase of the program which could be developed is one of helping government officials become more knowledgeable of the government's departments and their operations along with training for new officials.

#### Recommendations

This study has resulted in the author's following recommendations:

1. This study could be done again in Cattaraugus County in five years to measure changes in opinions and perception of priority issues.
2. This study could be used by other counties with appropriate modification, to determine interest and priorities of current issues.

November 29, 1971

## TO: COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Cattaraugus County is undergoing changes and growth that effect every citizen. The government of the county has the major responsibility for directing these changes in the best interests of the county citizens.

Because of your position and of your interest in our county's future, your opinions and comments are vital to this research study.

Will you please assure the success of this study by taking 15-20 minutes now to complete the questionnaire? Please return it in the self-addressed envelope.

For clarity, we are including an explanation of terms: County Government, as used in the questionnaire, includes the County Legislature and all the departments which carry on county functions, such as highway, treasurer, health, etc. Cooperative Extension is a tax supported (Federal, State and County funds) organization located at the Extension Center in Ellicottville, which carries on informal education with its professional staff for people in the county. All counties in New York State have an office with Cornell University providing backup for resources, research, and administration.

If you wish to receive a copy of the report of this research, put your name and address on the enclosed card and return it to me.

All individual information will be kept confidential.

I am anxious to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Roger W. Lord  
Roger W. Lord  
#171 Woodstock Trailer Park  
Columbia, Missouri 65201

## A STUDY OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

## OPINIONS ON PUBLIC INFORMATION ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE

TO: County Officials and Community Leaders in Cattaraugus County.

THIS INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL.

Please return by December 15 in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Roger W. Lord  
 Woodstock Trailer Park #171  
 Columbia, Missouri 65201

(Note - Unless otherwise explained numbers are percent of Total N=92)

1. Do you believe that the function of county government is as important today as it was 25 years ago?

97 Yes.  
2 No.  
1 Undecided.

2. Economic, social, or technological problems faced by county government are more difficult to cope with now than in the past.

72 Strongly agree.  
26 Agree.  
1 Undecided.  
1 Disagree.  
0 Strongly disagree.

What would be an example of a problem that is more difficult to cope with today than in the past? Welfare - 50 %, Sewage & Water - 17 %

New Resources - 10 %, Taxes - 4 %, Highways - 3 % others (Ergs, Ind.) - 16 %

3. Would it be helpful for newly elected or appointed officials to receive training for their duties?

80 Yes.  
4 No.  
15 Undecided.

4. Have the Federal and State governments unduly restricted the tax base available to county government?

39 Yes.  
23 No.  
36 Undecided,  
20 n/r

Total (n=33)

Comments: Undue tax base = 33 %, Tax

High - 17 %, Standard - 16 %, Tax Exempt Property - 11 %, None - 11 %.

5. Should county government have greater home rule powers?

80 Yes.

10 No.

9 Undecided.

1 omit

6. In regard to their knowledge of each others purposes and functions, the personnel of the various departments of county government are, in your opinion

4 very well informed.

17 well informed.

62 moderately informed.

13 ill informed.

0 uninformed.

3 omit

7. In regard to their knowledge of operations of each of the county departments, county legislators are, in your opinion

2 very well informed.

15 well informed.

60 moderately informed.

26 ill informed.

3 uninformed.

8. In regard to problems faced by county government, it has been your experience that local citizens are

0 very well informed.

2 well informed.

32 moderately informed.

52 ill informed.

14 uninformed.

9. It is important that local citizens be well informed on the operation of county government.

59 Strongly agree.

40 Agree.

1 Undecided.

0 Disagree.

0 Strongly disagree.

10. Elected county government officials generally want more participation of local citizens in public affairs.

13 Strongly agree.

40 Agree.

19 Undecided.

25 Disagree.

2 Strongly disagree.

1 omit

11. Appointed county government officials generally want more participation of local citizens in public affairs.

3 Strongly agree.  
32 Agree.  
36 Undecided.  
25 Disagree.  
3 Strongly disagree.  
1 omiss

12. Local citizens have an adequate knowledge of the organization, purpose and function of the various county departments and offices.

0 Strongly agree.  
5 Agree.  
4 Undecided.  
75 Disagree.  
15 Strongly disagree.

State the area of county government which you feel is least understood.

Welfare - 32%, Finances - 12%, Co. Legislature - 10%, Assessment - 3%  
Planning - 3%, Tax Rate - 3%, Health - 2%, Judicial - 1%, Clerk - 1%  
Omits - 27%.  
State the area of county government which you feel is best understood.

Highway - 16%, Sheriff - 11%, Welfare - 8%, Legislature - 7%  
Clerk - 3%, Budget - 3%, Elections - 3%, Health - 3%, Veterans - 1%  
Omits - 16%.

13. The citizen who is adequately informed on problems faced by the county government will generally support county government's efforts to solve problems.

25 Strongly agree.  
63 Agree.  
5 Undecided.  
5 Disagree.  
0 Strongly disagree.  
1 omiss

14. In your opinion, what are the current major issues facing county government today? Expanding Costs - 22%, Welfare - 22%, Taxes - 18%  
Administration - 13%, None Rate - 7%, Ecology - 4%, Health - 4%  
Disposal - 4%, Others (incarceration, employment, inflation) - 4%  
Omits - 5%

23. Here are statements that have been made about public education on county government and Cooperative Extension involvement in public affairs.

Please check (✓) the column which best describes your feelings about each statement.

<u>Public Knowledge of County Government</u>	<u>Part I</u>	<u>or</u>	Strongly Agree      Agree      Undecided      Disagree      Strongly Disagree					
			2	0	3	3	55	36
1. "wastes everyone's time."		2	12	67	13	5	0	
2. "will increase citizen participation."		2	17	75	4	1	0	
3. "aids public discussion."		2	4	22	7	55	10	
4. "only helps a few people."		2	20	62	13	3	0	
5. "increases democratic processes."		2	1	9	16	60	12	
6. "generates unrest."		2	0	1	2	62	33	
7. "serves no useful purpose."		2	20	72	2	4	0	
8. "creates better understanding."		2	0	7	13	71	8	
9. "leads to public dissatisfaction."		2	13	76	2	8	0	
10. "increases opportunity to be heard."		1						
<u>Involvement in Public Affairs      Part II</u>								
1. "won't help solve community problems."		1	1	7	15	64	12	
2. "will create more public interest."		1	8	76	9	5	1	
3. "is duplicating existing efforts."		2	1	9	26	53	9	
4. "helps some county residents."		1	1	83	4	9	2	
5. "helps public understanding of issues."		2	10	79	7	2	0	
6. "may only confuse things."		1	0	8	9	72	11	
7. "is a waste of tax money."		1	3	7	12	62	15	
8. "could provide more discussion opportunities."		1	9	80	7	3	0	
9. "is meddling where it doesn't belong!"		1	1	5	11	66	15	
10. "could help county government."		1	17	71	8	3	0	

UNDER 30 years = 30 C.M.T. = 1  
OVER 30 years = 68 years.

24. How long have you lived in Cattaraugus County? OVER 30 years = 68 years.

25. What is your present occupation? (No.) Co. Leg. - 17, Business - 17, Co. Govn & 16  
Laborer - 10, Education - 10, Medic - 8, Farmer - 11, Other - 11.

26. Do you hold a public office? (elected or appointed)

61 Yes.

39 No.

If yes, what office? (No.) Co. Leg. - 17 TOWN - 10 Other - 2  
Co. Dept. - 19 City - 5 Total - 55

How long? (No.) Less than 2 = 8 5-6 = 9  
2-4 = 24 Over 6 = 14

Previous public service positions held. (No.) TOWN = 18, CITY = 11

Village, County etc = 13, Total = 42

How long? (No.) Less than 4 years = 14, 5-15 years = 27, over 15 = 1

27. Are you a member of any community organization?

78 Yes.

16 No.

5 omit CIVIC - 24%, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - 20%  
If yes, list major ones. AGRIC - 14%, RELIGIOUS - 8%, OTHER - 34%

28. What is your age? Less than 40 = 27 OR 27%  
Ages from 40 = 64 OR 70% 10 omit

29. What is the highest grade you have completed in school? Circle one.

C.M.T. = 3

Grade School  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

High School  
9 10 11 12

College  
1 2 3 4 5 6  
more than 6  
43%

32%

22%

30. As a county official or community leader you can make any comments

you care to in the space below relating to the information in this study.

Remember, this information is confidential.

HAVE YOU ANSWERED ALL QUESTIONS?

If you would like to receive a copy of the report of this research, please write your name and address on the separate card provided.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Please return by December 15 in the enclosed envelope.

December 15, 1971

TO: CATTARAUGUS COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Before you are caught in the holiday rush, please.....

If you have not returned the questionnaire on "Public Information on County Government" please take 15-20 minutes to fill it out today. This study may have implications for our county government's future operations.

Many of the returns so far have some surprising and interesting comments.  
Your opinions are valued and needed.

I have enclosed another questionnaire in case you have mislaid the first one.

When complete, please mail it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. (Note) The enclosed card may be mailed separately.

Thank you for your cooperation. We hope you and your family will have a Happy Holiday Season!

Sincerely,  
*Roger W. Lord*

Roger W. Lord  
#171 Woodstock Trailer Park  
Columbia, Missouri 65201

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